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China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau)

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

Reports on [Hong Kong](#), [Macau](#), and [Tibetan](#) areas of China are appended at the end of this report.

The constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of activities of religious groups. The Government tries to control and regulate religion to prevent the rise of groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Nonetheless, membership in many faiths is growing rapidly.

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for religious groups and spiritual movements that are not registered with the Government. Unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference and harassment. Members of some unregistered religious groups were subjected to restrictions, including intimidation, harassment, and detention. Unregistered religious groups were pressured to register with government organs and government-sanctioned "patriotic" religious associations linked to the five main religions--Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

Religious practice and worship in officially sanctioned and unregistered places of worship continued to grow throughout the country, as did the number of religious believers. The extent of religious freedom varied widely within the country. For example, officials in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) tightly controlled religious activity, while elsewhere in the country, Muslims enjoyed greater religious freedom. Followers of Tibetan Buddhism, including in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas of the country (see separate appendix), also faced more restrictions on their religious practice and ability to organize than Buddhists in other parts of the country. In most areas of the country, religious believers could worship without difficulty in officially approved venues. The Government in some locations built new places of worship to accommodate increasing numbers of religious believers.

Repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and "house" churches continued to be widely reported. Central Government officials stated that friends and family holding prayer meetings at home need not register with the Government, but China's regulations on religious affairs (RRA) state that formal worship should take place only in government-approved venues. Sources in many locations continued to report that police and officials of local Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) interfered with house church meetings, often accusing the house church of disturbing neighbors or disrupting social order. House church leaders asserted that police routinely used noise complaints as a pretext for raiding their meetings. When police disrupted meetings, they sometimes detained worshippers attending such services for hours or days and prevented further house worship in the venues. Leaders sometimes faced harsher treatment, including detention, formal arrest and sentencing to reeducation or imprisonment. Again, treatment of unregistered groups varied regionally. For example, some local officials in Henan Province often mistreated unregistered Protestants, and some local officials in Hebei Province tightly controlled Roman Catholics loyal to the Vatican. In many localities, however, officials worked closely with registered religious groups to accomplish religious and social goals.

Government officials continued to scrutinize closely contacts between citizens and foreigners involved in religion. The Government detained some citizens for providing religious information to foreigners and prevented some religious figures from traveling abroad, including Henan Province Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang, who remained jailed, and Beijing church historian Zhang Yinan, whom authorities placed under house arrest and refused to issue a passport. In June 2006, Pastor Zhang Rongliang was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison for obtaining a passport through fraud and illegal border crossing. "Underground" Catholic bishops also faced repression, in large part due to their loyalty to the Vatican, which the Government accused of interfering in the country's internal affairs. The Government showed some signs of willingness to improve relations with the Vatican after the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI, but Beijing and the Vatican clashed in April 2006 over control of the process of ordaining bishops.

Despite government statements that minors are free to receive religious training that does not interfere with their secular education, there were ongoing reports of minors being prevented from receiving religious education. In August 2005 Uighur teacher Aminan Momixi and thirty students were detained after Momixi held Qur'an study sessions in her home during summer vacation.

There was little evidence that the RRA, which took effect in 2005, improved the situation of religious freedom. While the regulations brought regulatory activities governing religious affairs within a legal framework, they continued to define only government-approved practices and faiths as normal or legitimate.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as "cults" in general and of small Christian-based groups and the Falun Gong in particular. In June 2006 Pastor Xu Shuangfu and five other members of the Three Grades of Servants church, which the Government also considers a cult, were sentenced to death in a murder case involving conflict between the church and the Eastern Lightning group, which China also considers a cult. Scores of Three Grades of Servants church members were tried during the period covered by this report. Falun Gong practitioners continued to face arrest, detention, and imprisonment, and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons, reeducation through labor camps, and extra-judicial "legal education" centers, while some who recanted returned from detention. Reports of abuse were difficult to confirm within the country and the group engaged in almost no public activity within the country. Overseas Falun Gong practitioners claimed this was a result of the harsh government campaign, which began with the 1999 crackdown against the group. There were continuing revelations about the extra-legal activities of the Government's "610 office" including torture and forced confessions, a state security agency implicated in most alleged abuses of Falun Gong practitioners.

Some social tension existed between religious believers and nonbelievers. Religious communities generally coexist without significant friction.

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. embassy in Beijing, and the consulates general in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country. U.S. officials condemned abuses while supporting positive trends within the country. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with government leaders, including in his April 2006 and November and September 2005 meetings with President Hu Jintao. President Bush discussed religious freedom and attended a church service during his November 2005 visit to Beijing. At the White House in May 2006 President Bush met with three Christian intellectuals who are leaders in the house church movement: Yu Jie, Li Baiguang, and Wang Yi at the White House in May 2006. Senior U.S. officials called on the Government to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and to respect religious freedom. Assistant secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Barry Lowenkron held talks on religious freedom during a February 2006 visit to Beijing. U.S. ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr. highlighted problems of religious freedom and cases of individual religious prisoners of conscience in his public speeches and in his private diplomacy with Chinese officials. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In Washington and in Beijing, in public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise religious freedom and to release all those serving sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 3.5 million square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2005 Government White Paper, there were "more than 100 million religious adherents," representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. According to this official publication, the country had more than 85,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, and more than 3,000 religious organizations. These same official statistics have been used unchanged since 1997, when the State Council Information Office published a White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief. Given the growth in religion since 1997, unpublished estimates suggest the country had over 200 million believers and 100,000 sites for religious activities.

The country has five main religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. While these are the primary religions, the 2005 religious affairs regulations did not identify "official" religions. The Russian Orthodox Church also operated in some regions, and other religions existed in the country's expatriate community. Most of the country's population did not formally practice any religion. Approximately 8 percent of the population was Buddhist, approximately 1.5 percent was Muslim, an estimated 0.4 percent belonged to the official Catholic Church, an estimated 0.4 to 0.6 percent belonged to the unofficial Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church, an estimated 1.2 to 1.5 percent was registered as Protestant, and perhaps 2.5 percent worshipped in Protestant house churches that were independent of government control.

Religious officials offered no official estimate of the number of Taoists, but academics placed the number at several hundred thousand. According to the Taoist Association, there were more than 25,000 Taoist monks and nuns and more than 1,500 Taoist temples.

Traditional folk religions (worship of local gods, heroes, and ancestors) have been revived, are practiced by hundreds of millions of citizens, and are tolerated to varying degrees as loose affiliates of Taoism, Buddhism, or ethnic minority cultural practices. During the year, the national religious affairs ministry known as SARA (the State Administration for Religious Affairs) set up a new unit to supervise folk religions as well as religions outside the main five, including religions practiced by foreigners.

The Government estimated that there are more than 100 million Buddhists, making Buddhism the organized religion with the largest body of followers. However, it was difficult to estimate accurately the number of Buddhists because they did not have congregational memberships and often did not participate in public ceremonies. The Government reported that there were 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries and more than 200,000 nuns and monks. Most believers, including most ethnic Han Buddhists, practiced Mahayana Buddhism. Most Tibetans and ethnic Mongolians practiced Tibetan Buddhism, a Mahayana adaptation. Some ethnic minorities in southwest Yunnan Province practiced Theravada Buddhism, the dominant tradition in neighboring Southeast Asia.

According to government figures, there were 20 million Muslims, more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (more than half of which are in Xinjiang), and more than 45,000 imams nationwide. The country had 10 predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, the largest of which were the Hui, estimated to number nearly 10 million. Hui are centered in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, but there were significant concentrations of Hui throughout the country, including in Gansu, Henan, Qinghai, Yunnan, Hebei, and Xinjiang Provinces. Hui slightly outnumbered Uighur Muslims, who lived primarily in Xinjiang. According to an official 2005 report, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region had 23,788 mosques and 26,000 clerics at the end of 2003, but observers noted that fewer than half of the mosques were authorized to hold Friday prayer and holiday services. The country also had more than 1 million Kazakh Muslims and thousands of Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baoan, and Tatar Muslims.

Approximately 8 to 10 million Catholics lived in the country, according to Chinese Catholics, although precise figures were difficult to determine. These included both the 4.5 million persons registered with the official Catholic Patriotic Association and an equal or greater number who worship in unregistered Catholic churches affiliated with the Vatican. According to official figures, the government-approved Catholic Patriotic Association had 67 bishops, 5,000 priests and nuns, and more than 6,000 churches and meetinghouses. There were thought to be approximately forty bishops operating "underground," some of who were likely in prison or under house arrest.

The Government maintained that the country had more than 16 million Protestants, more than 55,000 registered churches and other places of worship, and 18 theological schools. Officials from the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (the state-approved Protestant religious organization) had estimated that at least 20 million Chinese worship in official churches. One local academic put the number of Protestants between 50 and 60 million, including both officially approved and unregistered churches. Foreign sources estimated that there were between 80-100 million Protestants worshipping in unregistered churches. A 2004 nongovernmental survey in Beijing tallied over 100,000 unregistered Protestants, far more than the 30,000 registered with authorities. Domestic and foreign experts agreed that the number of Protestants was growing rapidly. According to state-run media reports in August 2004, the number of Protestants was increasing by up to 600,000 annually. While it is difficult to arrive at an exact estimate, Christian groups outside China believe that the number of Chinese attending unregistered churches is expanding at a much faster rate.

Falun Gong blends aspects of Taoism, Buddhism, and the meditation techniques and physical exercises of qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi. Despite the spiritual content of some of Li's teachings, Falun Gong does not consider itself a religion and has no clergy or places of worship. Estimates of the number of Falun Gong (or Wheel of the Law, also known as Falun Dafa) practitioners varied widely; the Government claimed that prior to its harsh crackdown on the Falun Gong beginning in 1999, there might have been as many as 2.1 million adherents of Falun Gong in the country. Some estimated that the true number of Falun Gong adherents in the country before the crackdown was much higher. The number has declined as a result of the crackdown, but there were still hundreds of thousands of practitioners in the country, according to reliable estimates.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to manage religious affairs by restricting religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of activities of religious groups to prevent the rise of possible competing sources of authority outside of the control of the Government.

The criminal law states that government officials who deprive citizens of religious freedom may, in serious cases, be sentenced to up to two years in prison; however, there were no known cases of persons being punished under this statute.

The state reserves itself the right to register and thus to allow particular religious groups and spiritual movements to operate. For each of the five main religions, there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities and with which religious groups must affiliate. SARA is responsible for monitoring and judging the legitimacy of religious activity. SARA and the CCP United Front Work Department (UFD) provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of government regulations regarding religious activity, including the role of foreigners in religious activity. Employees of SARA and the UFD are rarely religious adherents and often are party members. Communist Party members are directed by party doctrine to be atheists and their family members are

discouraged from public participation in religious ceremonies.

Public security forces maintain designated units charged with monitoring religious behavior that violates law or regulation. Such police monitor unregistered facilities, check to see that religious activities do not disrupt public order, and combat illegal cults.

In March 2005 the Government enacted the RRA, replacing previous 1994 regulations governing religious sites. The regulations regularize management of religious affairs within a legal framework and codify pre-existing administrative practice and regulation. Unlike the 1994 regulations, the RRA protect the rights of registered religious groups, under certain conditions, to possess property, publish literature, train and approve clergy, and collect donations. Comprehensive implementing regulations had not been issued by the end of the period covered by this report. There was little evidence that the new regulations improved religious freedom.

Like the 1994 law, the RRA require religious groups to register places of worship. Spiritual activities in places of worship that have not registered may be considered illegal, and participants can be punished. There are five requirements for the registration of "sites for religious activities:" First, establishment of the site must be consistent with the overall purpose of the RRA and must not be used to "disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the state" and must not be "subject to any foreign domination." Second, local religious citizens must have a need to carry out collective religious activities frequently. Third, there must be religious personnel qualified to preside over the activities. Fourth, the site must have "necessary funds." Fifth, the site must be "rationally located" so as not to interfere with normal production and neighboring residents. Government officials claim that registration requirements are simple and places of worship are not required to affiliate with one of the five official "patriotic" religious organizations that correspond to the five main faiths. However, according to the Government's April 2005 policy statement Measures for the Approval of Religious Activities, only pre-existing local, provincial or national-level religious organizations are authorized to apply for approval of a new religious venue and approval is granted only after an inspection by the local Religious Affairs Bureau.

Under the RRA, clergy need not be approved by the Government but must be reported to the Government after being selected pursuant to the rules of the relevant religious association.

Nearly all local RAB officials require Protestant churches to affiliate with the (Protestant) Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC). Credentialing procedures effectively required clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC, a practice that appeared unchanged since adoption of the new regulations. Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refuse to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC. Some groups disagree with the TSPM/CCC teachings that all Protestant beliefs are compatible and that differences between Protestant denominations are irrelevant. In a few regions, Protestant groups have registered without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. These exceptions include the Local Assemblies Protestant churches in Zhejiang Province, where no significant TSPM/CCC community exists, and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province, both of which operate openly without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. Additionally, the (Russian) Orthodox Church has been able to operate without affiliating with a government organization in a few parts of the country. In other regions, officially "post-denominational" Protestant churches informally aligned themselves with Protestant denominations. Some pastors in official churches said that denominational affiliation was an important way of drawing parishioners.

Some groups register voluntarily, some register under pressure, and authorities refuse to register others. Some religious groups have declined to register out of principled opposition to state control of religion. Others do not register due to fear of adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders or members. Unregistered groups also frequently refuse to register for fear that doing so would require theological compromises, curtail doctrinal freedom, or allow government authorities to control sermon content. Some groups claimed that authorities refused them registration without explanation or detained group members who met with officials to attempt to register. The Government contended that these refusals mainly were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities or failure to meet other legal requirements.

The Government has banned all groups that it has determined to be "cults," including the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church, the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), the Three Grades of Servants (also known as San Ba Pu Ren), the Association of Disciples, the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, the Family of Love, the South China Church, the Falun Gong, and the Zhong Gong movements. (Zhong Gong is a qigong exercise discipline with some mystical tenets.)

After the revised criminal law came into effect in 1997, offenses related to membership in unapproved cults and religious groups were classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. A ban on cults, including the Falun Gong spiritual movement, was enacted in 1999. Under Article 300 of the criminal law, "cult" members who "disrupt public order" or distribute publications may be sentenced to three to seven years in prison, while "cult" leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to seven years or more in prison. Under the new Public Security Administrative Punishment Law, which took effect March 1, 2006, Falun Gong adherents could face five to fifteen days of administrative detention and fines of up to \$125 (1,000 RMB) for using superstitious cults or qigong activities to disrupt public order or harm public health. Public security officials said the law would be used against Falun Gong.

Government sensitivity to Muslim communities varied widely. In some predominantly Muslim areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially in Xinjiang among the Uighurs, officials continued to restrict or tightly control religious expression and teaching. Police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused by the Government of supporting separatism. The Government permits, and in some cases subsidizes, Muslim citizens who make the Hajj to Mecca. More than 10 thousand Chinese Muslims made the Hajj journey in 2006, and some 6,900 traveled in groups sponsored by the China Islamic Association.

In past years local officials destroyed several unregistered places of worship, although there were no reports of widespread razing of churches or shrines during the period covered by this report. The Government has restored or rebuilt churches, temples, mosques, and monasteries damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and allowed the reopening of some seminaries, although the pace and scope of restoration activity has varied from locality to locality. There is far greater interest in religion and a far greater number of religious adherents today than at any time since the 1949 establishment of the People's Republic. Nonetheless, there remained a shortage of temples, churches, and mosques and many of those that existed are overcrowded and in poor condition.

In January 2005 the Government organized a national meeting on religion. The meeting addressed similar themes to a series of conferences on religion in January 2004 that advised officials to guard against Christian-influenced "cults" and avoid "foreign infiltration under cover of religion." In early 2005 five government training sessions were held across the country for approximately 3,000 religious affairs officials to educate them about the RRA.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for religious freedom and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for members of many unregistered religious groups and for groups, such as the Falun Gong, which the Government considered "cults." The Government tends to perceive unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority, and it attempts to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP.

Some local authorities continued a selective crackdown on unregistered religious groups, and the Central Government did not oppose this crackdown. Police closed unregistered mosques and temples, as well as some Catholic churches and Protestant "house churches," many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. Several unregistered church leaders reported continuing pressure from local authorities. Despite these efforts at control, official sources, religious professionals, and members of both officially sanctioned and unregistered places of worship all reported that the number of religious adherents in the country continued to grow.

The Government makes political demands on the clergy or leadership of registered groups. For example, authorities have required clergy to publicly endorse government policies or denounce Falun Gong. In other areas, including Xinjiang and the Tibetan Autonomous Region, authorities require clergy to participate in patriotic education. The Government continued its harsh repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement and of "cults" in general. As in past years, local authorities moved against houses of worship outside their control that grew too large or espoused beliefs considered threatening to "state security." Overall, the basic policy of permitting religious activity to take place relatively unfettered in government-approved sites and under government control remained unchanged.

Official tolerance for Buddhism and Taoism has been greater than that for Christianity, and these religions often face fewer restrictions. However, as these non-Western religions have grown rapidly in recent years, there were signs of greater government concern and new restrictions, especially on groups that blend tenets from a number of religious beliefs. The Government also sought to regulate closely the financial affairs of Buddhist and Taoist temples.

During the period covered by this report, government repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement continued. Membership in the Falun Gong and other groups considered cults was illegal. Distributing Falun Gong literature or encouraging others to join the spiritual movement was punishable by criminal and administrative sanctions, including reeducation. As in past years, foreigners who distributed Falun Gong materials were expelled from the country, including an Australian expelled in October 2005 after attempting to distribute the book *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party*. In January 2006 the Government released U.S. citizen Charles Lee after three years of imprisonment for Falun Gong-related activities. The authorities also continued to oppose other groups the Government considered "cults," such as the Xiang Gong, Guo Gong, and Zhong Gong qigong groups.

The Government has labeled folk religions as "feudal superstition," and followers sometimes were subject to harassment and repression.

Despite the new religious affairs regulations, officials in many locations continued to pressure religious groups to register with government religious affairs authorities. There was a great deal of variation in how local authorities handled unregistered religious groups. In certain regions, government supervision of religious activity was minimal, and registered and unregistered churches existed openly side-by-side and were treated similarly by the authorities. In such areas, many congregants worshipped in both types of churches. In other regions, local officials supervise religion more strictly, and authorities cracked down on unregistered churches and their members. Local regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce vigorously

government policy regarding unregistered churches.

In some areas, despite the rapidly growing religious population, it remained difficult to register new places of worship, even for officially recognized churches and mosques.

Local officials have great discretion in determining whether "house churches" violate regulations. The term "house church" is used to describe both unregistered churches and gatherings in homes or businesses of groups of Christians to conduct small, private worship services. SARA officials confirmed during the year that unregistered churches are illegal, but said prayer meetings and Bible study groups held among friends and family in homes are legal and need not register. In some parts of the country, unregistered house churches with hundreds of members meet openly with the full knowledge of local authorities, who characterize the meetings as informal gatherings to pray, sing, and study the Bible. In other areas, house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends are not permitted. House churches often encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas. Urban house churches are generally limited to meetings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas may number in the hundreds.

Both official and unofficial Christian churches have problems training adequate numbers of clergy to meet the needs of their growing congregations. Due to restrictions and prohibitions on religion between 1955 and 1985, no priests or other clergy in the official churches were ordained during that period; most priests and pastors were trained either before 1955 or after 1985, resulting in a shortage of trained clerics between the ages of 40 and 70. Thus, as senior clerics retire, there are relatively few experienced clerics to replace them. The Government states that the official Catholic Church has trained more than 900 priests in the past 10 years. The Government permits registered religions to train clergy and allows limited numbers of Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics, and Buddhist clergy to go abroad for additional religious studies, but some religious students have had difficulty obtaining approval to study abroad. In most cases, foreign organizations provide funding for such training programs. In the past, some Catholic clerics had complained that they were forced to bribe local officials before being allowed to enter seminaries. Due to government prohibitions, unofficial or unregistered churches have particularly significant problems training clergy, and many clergy receive only limited and inadequate preparation.

The law does not prohibit religious believers from holding public office; however, party membership is required for almost all high-level positions in Government, state-owned businesses, and many official organizations. Communist Party officials confirmed during the period covered by this report that party membership and religious belief were incompatible. The CCP reportedly has issued two circulars since 1995 ordering party members not to hold religious beliefs and ordering the expulsion of party members who belong to religious organizations, whether open or clandestine. Muslims allegedly have been fired from government posts for praying during working hours. The "Routine Service Regulations" of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) state explicitly that servicemen "may not take part in religious or superstitious activities." Party and PLA military personnel have been expelled for adhering to the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

In past years, government sources reported that up to 25 percent of Communist Party officials in certain localities engage in some kind of religious activity. Most officials who practice a religion are Buddhists or practice a form of folk religion. Some religious figures, while not members of the CCP, are included in national and local government organizations, usually to represent their constituency on cultural and educational matters. The National People's Congress (NPC) includes several religious leaders. Two of the NPC Standing Committee's vice chairmen are Fu Tieshan, a bishop and vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and Phagpalha Geleg Namgyal, a Tibetan "living Buddha." Religious groups also are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory forum that is led by the CCP and consults with social groups outside the Party.

The Roman Catholic Church forbids abortions and the use of artificial contraception. Some Chinese Catholics consider the Government's birth limitation laws and policies a violation of their religious freedom. In many parts of the country, women are required to use contraception and to have an abortion if the pregnancy violates government population control regulations.

The Government does not allow the government-authorized Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and its clergy to recognize the authority of the pope in some matters, which remained a significant reason for the persistence of a large unregistered Catholic church that remained unaffiliated with the Government and Patriotic Association. Pressure by the Patriotic Association on unregistered Catholic bishops to join the official Church continued, and unregistered priests and bishops were often detained. Despite some efforts toward rapprochement between the Government and the Vatican, the Government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and there was no Vatican representative on the Mainland. The Vatican's diplomatic recognition of Taiwan and differences over selection of bishops remained the primary obstacles to improved relations. After the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005, Government and religious officials made conciliatory statements and welcomed Pope Benedict XVI. The Vatican invited four Chinese bishops, including one not recognized by the Government, to an October 2005 synod in Rome, but the Patriotic Association declined the invitations.

In March 2006 a dispute erupted between the Patriotic Association and the Vatican after the Vatican elevated

prodemocracy Hong Kong Bishop Joseph Zen to cardinal. In April and May, the Patriotic Association ignored a Vatican request to delay the ordinations of Bishops Ma Yingling of Kunming, Yunnan Province, and Liu Xinhong of Wuhu, Anhui Province. The Vatican criticized the ordinations as illicit and referred to the possibility of excommunication of those ordained or conducting an ordination without papal approval. The Patriotic Association and SARA responded that the bishops had been democratically elected by priests of their dioceses and that the Vatican was interfering in the country's internal affairs. The disagreement disrupted a period of more than two years during which several Bishops were appointed with both government's and Vatican approval, including auxiliary bishops in Shanghai and Xian. Other bishops, however, were ordained with both government and Vatican approval before and after the dispute began. An increasing number of priests and bishops publicly acknowledged that the Vatican had approved their appointment. They suffered no punishment for this public stance, although the Government denied that the Vatican played any role in approving the country's clergy.

In fact, most bishops recognized by the Patriotic Association have been recognized by the Vatican either before or after their appointment by the Government. In a few cases, the bishop named by the government-affiliated church conflicted directly with the bishop recognized by the Vatican, a situation that contributed significantly to tension between the Patriotic Association and the unregistered Catholic church and to tension between the Vatican and the Government. The Patriotic Association said more than forty of China's nearly one hundred dioceses had no bishop in place.

There were large Muslim populations in many areas, but government sensitivity to these communities varied widely. Generally speaking, the country's Hui Muslims, who were ethnically Han Chinese and lived in Han communities throughout the country had greater religious freedom than Turkic Muslims such as the Uighurs, who were concentrated in the western part of the country. In areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially among the Uighurs in Xinjiang, regulations restricting Muslims' religious activity, teaching, and places of worship continued to be implemented forcefully. In Xinjiang officials continued to restrict the building of mosques and the training of clergy and prohibited the teaching of Islam to children. In addition to the restrictions on practicing religion placed on party members and government officials throughout the country, Muslim teachers, professors, and university students in Xinjiang are not allowed to attend mosque services or practice religion openly. Female university students and professors are discouraged from wearing headscarves or skirts. Some ethnic Tajiks in Xinjiang cannot attend mosque until over age 30. However, in other areas, particularly in areas populated by the Hui ethnic group, there was substantial mosque construction and renovation and also apparent freedom to worship. Xinjiang authorities continued to use counter terrorism as a pretext for religious repression of Uighur Muslims, according to human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Because the Xinjiang Government regularly fails to distinguish carefully among those involved in peaceful activities in support of independence, "illegal" religious activities, and violent terrorism, it is often difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those seeking to worship, those peacefully seeking political goals, or those engaged in violence. As a result, Xinjiang authorities often charge religious believers with committing the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and Muslim extremism. While targeted at Muslims, this tight control of religion in Xinjiang affected followers of other religions as well. Xinjiang provincial-level Communist Party and government officials repeatedly called for stronger management of religious affairs and for the separation of religion from administrative matters.

Xinjiang officials told foreign observers that children under eighteen are not permitted to attend religious services in mosques in Xinjiang. However, children were observed attending prayer services at mosques in Beijing and other parts of the country. Fundamentalist Muslim leaders received particularly harsh treatment. In 2000 the authorities began conducting monthly political study sessions for religious personnel; the program reportedly continued during the period covered by this report. In August 2005 the Government reportedly banned the Sala movement of Islam and detained more than 150 followers in Xinjiang. Moreover, security authorities were authorized to "strike hard" against groups believed to have plans to disrupt celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Government's rule in Xinjiang in October 2005. This included restrictions on a movement of Islam called Salafism due to concerns followers supported extremism. No disruptions were reported, but scores were reportedly harassed and detained in the run-up to the anniversary. Because of government control of information coming from Xinjiang, many reported restrictions were difficult to confirm.

In a growing number of areas, authorities have displayed increasing tolerance of religious practice by foreigners, provided their religious observance does not involve nationals. Weekly services of the foreign Jewish community in Beijing have been held uninterrupted since 1995, and High Holy Day observances have been allowed for more than fifteen years. Both Reform and Orthodox Jewish services were held weekly during the period covered by this report. The Shanghai Jewish community has received permission from authorities to hold a few services each year in a historic Shanghai synagogue that was converted into a government office. However, officials gave a former synagogue in Harbin to the Russian Orthodox community, causing some tension between the local Russian Orthodox and expatriate Jewish groups. Expatriate members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church or Mormons) met regularly in a number of cities. The LDS Church had permission to hold services in a Beijing facility reserved for its use. A group consisting of citizens who joined the LDS Church while overseas also regularly used the same facility, although not at the same time as expatriates. Bah'ai representatives reportedly approached the Government about gaining greater freedom of religion as well. The Government stated it was willing to consider approving new religious organizations outside the five main faiths but had not yet done so at the end of the reporting period.

Regulations enacted in 1994 and expanded in 2000 codified many existing rules involving foreigners, including a ban

on proselytizing. However, for the most part, authorities allowed foreign nationals to preach to other foreigners, bring in religious materials for personal use, and preach to citizens at churches, mosques, and temples at the invitation of registered religious organizations. Foreigners could and often did attend worship services at registered churches, mosques, and temples in major cities, where many local houses of worship offered services in languages other than Chinese. Foreigners legally are barred from conducting missionary activities; however, foreign Christians teaching on college campuses openly profess their faith with minimum interference from the authorities, provided their proselytizing remains discreet. Many registered Christian groups throughout the country have developed close ties with local officials, in some cases operating schools and homes for the care of the aged. In addition Buddhist-run private schools and orphanages in the central part of the country also offer training to teenagers and young adults.

Some foreign church organizations came under pressure to register with government authorities, and some foreign missionaries whose activities extended beyond the expatriate community were expelled or asked to leave the country. In 2003, the Government banned the documentary film "The Cross" and the book "Jesus in Beijing."

The increase in the number of Christians in the country has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles. Bibles can be purchased at many bookstores and at most officially recognized churches. Many house church members buy their Bibles at such places without incident. A Bible is affordable for most citizens. The supply of Bibles is adequate in most parts of the country, but members of unregistered churches complained that the supply and distribution of Bibles in some places, especially rural locations, was inadequate. Individuals cannot order Bibles directly from publishing houses, and house church Christians reported that purchase of large numbers of Bibles could bring unfavorable attention to the purchaser. Customs officials continued to monitor for the "smuggling" of Bibles and other religious materials into the country. Authorities sometimes confiscate Bibles in raids on house churches.

Bibles, like all other literature, can only be published by state-approved publishing houses. The Amity Publishing House in Nanjing has printed more than forty million Bibles in the past twenty-five years. However, as part of a campaign against illegal publishing, religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qur'ans, were often confiscated and the unauthorized publishing houses were often closed. Religious adherents were arrested and jailed on charges of illegal publishing.

The Government teaches atheism in schools. However, university-level study of religion is expanding. Some universities mandated a course on religion for students in certain disciplines during the period covered by this report.

Senior government officials claim that the country has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. However, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Education noted after her 2003 visit that students lack basic internationally recognized rights to religious education. Moreover, some local officials, especially in Xinjiang, prevented children from attending worship services, and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than eighteen from entering. Nongovernmental organizations reported that Christian and Muslim children in Xinjiang were prevented from receiving religious education. In one case, local officials denied a Christian group permission to operate a Sunday school in Urumqi, Xinjiang. To support their rejection of the Sunday school, the officials claimed it would be unfair to local Muslims to allow Christians but not Muslims to educate their youth. In some Muslim areas, minors attend religious schools in addition to state-run schools. In some areas, large numbers of young persons attend religious services at both registered and unregistered places of worship.

There were at least seventy-six Government-recognized training institutions for clergy in the five main religions, including fifty-four Catholic and Protestant seminaries, ten institutes to train imams and Islamic scholars, and dozens of institutes to train Buddhist monks. Students who attend these institutes must demonstrate "political reliability," and all graduates must pass an examination on their theological and political knowledge to qualify for the clergy. Official religious organizations also administered local Bible schools, monastery-run schools, and other types of training centers. The number of secular universities with a center for the study of theology doubled from seventeen in 2002 to thirty-four in 2005.

The Government has stated that there are ten colleges conducting Islamic higher education and two other Islamic schools in Xinjiang operating with government support. In addition, provincial and local Islamic communities have established numerous Arabic schools and mosque schools. The former concentrates on Arabic language study, while the latter often serve as a stepping-stone to apprenticeship as an assistant to an imam or other Muslim religious worker. Some young Muslims study outside of the country in Muslim religious schools.

Religious schools and training institutions for religious leaders other than the officially recognized ones also exist but cannot register as legal institutions. The quality of education at unregistered institutions varies. Some such institutions are closed when they come to the attention of local authorities.

Officials sometimes refused to issue passports to religious figures, especially those from unregistered groups. Zhang Yinan, a house church historian released from reeducation in 2005, was denied a passport on such grounds during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, unapproved religious and spiritual groups remained under scrutiny, and in some cases officials harassed members of such groups. In some areas, unregistered Protestant and Catholic groups, Muslim Uighurs, Tibetan Buddhists, and members of groups that the Government determined to be "cults," especially the Falun Gong spiritual movement, were subject to government pressure and sometimes suffered abuse.

Offenses related to membership in unapproved religious groups are often classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. According to the Law Yearbook of China, 8,119 cases of disturbing the social order or cheating by the use of superstition were filed in 2004, of which 7,751 resulted in formal charges, criminal, or administrative punishment. The number was approximately the same as in the previous year. Government officials said that no persons were prosecuted for their religious belief or activity. However, religious leaders and worshippers faced criminal and administrative punishment on a wide range of charges, including those related to the Government's refusal to allow members of unregistered groups to assemble, travel, and publish freely or in connection with its ban on proselytizing. The Government's restrictions on unregistered religious groups increased in 1999 in response to large public protests by the Falun Gong in sensitive locations including Tiananmen Square and the Zhongnanhai Communist Party leadership compound.

Religious adherents were beaten, and some died in police custody after being detained in connection with their religious belief or practice. In June 2004, the government-run Legal Daily newspaper reported that Jiang Zongxiu had died in police custody in Zunyi, Guizhou Province, after being arrested for distributing Bibles. A Legal Daily editorial comment condemned local officials for mistreating Jiang. In 2004, Gu Xianggao, allegedly a member of the Three Grades of Servants Church that the Government considers a cult (discussed below), was beaten to death in a Heilongjiang Province security facility. Public security officials paid compensation to Gu's family. In September 2005 government agents reportedly broke bones of Christian businessman Tong Qimiao at a police station in Kashgar, Xinjiang, while he was being interrogated about the activities of local house churches. In November 2005 hired thugs beat sixteen nuns, one of whom was blinded and another partially paralyzed, when the nuns protested demolition of a Catholic school in Xian. Hundreds of Catholics marched on Government offices in protest, and the Vatican publicly protested the incident.

There were credible reports of torture and deaths in custody of Falun Gong practitioners in past years and overseas Falun Gong groups claimed that such incidents continued. In April 2006 overseas Falun Gong groups claimed that a hospital in Sujiatun, Shenyang, had been the site of a "concentration camp" and of mass organ harvesting, including from live prisoners. In response to the allegations, the Government opened the facility in question to diplomatic observers and foreign journalists. Observers found nothing inconsistent with the operation of a hospital.

In December 2005 a Beijing attorney sent an open letter to President Hu Jintao highlighting abuses of Falun Gong practitioners. The letter described the electric shock torture of Zhang Zhikui, a Falun Gong practitioner arrested for repeated petitioning in Beijing, and the October beating death in Changchun, Jilin Province of Liu Boyang and his mother Wang Shouhui. The letter, and a similar open letter sent by the attorney in 2004, referred to the extra-legal activities of the 610 office, reportedly involved in many of the abuses of Falun Gong. In 2005 the Government revoked the attorney's license to practice law, and the attorney has claimed repeated government harassment, including an automobile accident that he publicly described as an "assassination attempt." Foreigners attempting to meet with the attorney have been detained and harassed.

According to Falun Gong practitioners in the United States, since 1999 more than 100,000 practitioners have been detained for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhere to the teachings of Falun Gong, or refusing to criticize the organization or its founder. The organization reported that its members have been subject to excessive force, abuse, rape, detention, and torture, and that some of its members, including children, have died in custody. NGOs not affiliated with the Falun Gong documented nearly 500 cases of Falun Gong members detained, prosecuted, or sentenced to reeducation during the period covered by this report. Credible estimates suggested the actual number was much higher. In November 2005 police at the Dongchengfang Police Station in Tunzhou City, Hebei Province, reportedly raped two Falun Gong practitioners. Reliable sources indicated that Zheng Ruihuan and Liu Yinglan were detained in Shandong Province in July 2005 for practicing Falun Gong. In May 2006, Yuan Yuju and Liang Jinhui, relatives of a Hong Kong journalist who works for a television station supportive of Falun Gong, were sentenced to reeducation for using an illegal cult to organize and obstruct justice, relating to their distribution of Falun Gong materials. Some foreign observers estimated that at least half of the 250,000 officially recorded inmates in the country's reeducation-through-labor camps were Falun Gong adherents. Falun Gong sources overseas placed the number even higher. Hundreds of Falun Gong adherents were also incarcerated in legal education centers, a form of administrative detention, upon completion of their reeducation-through-labor sentences. Government officials denied the existence of such "legal education" centers. According to the Falun Gong, hundreds of its practitioners have been confined to psychiatric institutions and forced to take medications or undergo electric shock treatment against their will.

In July 2005 six members of the group Way of the Goddess of Mercy (Guanyin Famen), which the Government considers a "cult," were sentenced to two to four years in prison for using a cult organization resulting in the first criminal conviction of members of the group in Xinjiang. According to state-run media, Liu Shuming, Yang Huiqin, Li Yanxin, Liu Wangpeng, Wang Cahojun, and Wang Dexiu, all of Urumqi, Xinjiang, produced material about Guanyin Famen that they intended to circulate.

Many religious leaders and adherents, including those in official churches, have been detained, arrested, or sentenced

to prison terms for activities they claimed related to their religious practice, although the Government denied jailing anyone solely because of his or her religion. Local authorities used an administrative process to punish members of unregistered religious groups. Citizens may be sentenced by a nonjudicial panel of police and local authorities to up to three years in reeducation-through-labor camps. Many religious detainees and prisoners were held in such facilities during the period covered by this report. In some areas, security authorities used threats, demolition of unregistered property, extortion, interrogation, detention, and at times beatings and torture to harass leaders of unauthorized groups and their followers. Unregistered religious groups that preach beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine (such as the imminent coming of the Apocalypse or holy war or groups that have charismatic leaders) often are singled out for particularly severe harassment. Some observers have attributed the unorthodox beliefs of some of these groups to poorly trained clergy and lack of access to religious texts.

In Xinjiang, Uighur Muslim Aminan Momixi was detained in August 2005 after teaching the Qur'an to more than thirty students in her home. Provincial officials stated that she was released after a period of education and training, but the Government refused to clarify her whereabouts.

On May 28, 2006, Rebiya Kadeer, a Uighur Muslim activist, was elected president of the Uyghur American Association, an NGO which advocates for the human rights, including religious freedom, of the Uighur people. The following day Xinjiang police arrested three of her adult sons and placed two of her other family members under house arrest. Government officials reportedly beat Kadeer's sons and charged them with financial crimes related to their mother's business ventures before she was released to the United States.

Protestant Christians who worshipped outside of government-approved venues or in their homes continued to face detention and abuse, especially for attempting to meet in large groups, traveling within and outside of the country for religious meetings, and otherwise holding peaceful religious assemblies in unregistered venues. U.S. legal permanent resident Wu Hao was detained by security officials in February 2006 after filming house church services in Beijing for a documentary film. As of the end of the reporting period, he had not been charged, and the Government refused to clarify his whereabouts. Henan Province house Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang was convicted in June 2006 of obtaining a passport through fraud and illegal border crossing. He was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison. In August 2004 in Zhejiang Province, the Government convicted Beijing-based house church Christians Liu Fenggang, Xu Yonghai and Zhang Shengqi on charges of disclosing state secrets after they provided an overseas Chinese magazine information about abuse of Christians in the country. Xu and Zhang were released at the expiry of their sentences, but Liu's three-year sentence had not yet expired. In May 2006 after President Bush met with Christian intellectuals in the White House, security officials harassed relatives of at least one of the meeting's participants.

Police and other security officials disrupted Protestant religious retreats and large meetings on many occasions. In July 2005 the Government reportedly detained one hundred Sunday school students in Hebei Province. In August 2005 police reportedly raided a training class in Jiangxi Province for Sunday school teachers. On Christmas Day 2005, police reportedly raided an unregistered church in Manasu County, Xinjiang, destroying property and detained several worshippers. The U.S.-based China Aid Association said more than 200 were detained, including Pastor Guo Xianyao. In February 2006, Lou Yuanqi was reportedly detained for holding unauthorized church services in Xinjiang. In April Li Huimin was reportedly sentenced to reeducation in Henan Province for holding house church meetings at his home. In May several house church activists were detained in Henan Province's Fugou County. At least three remained detained at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government continued its tight monitoring of religious publications. In July 2005 several Uighur Muslims were reportedly detained for possession of an illegal religious book called the Mishkat-ul Misabih and other illegal religious activities in Xinjiang. In November 2005 the Government convicted Beijing-based house Christian pastor Cai Zhuohua and two relatives of operating an illegal business based on his work publishing Christian literature. More than 200,000 copies of the Bible and other religious texts were reportedly confiscated from Cai. Despite international appeals on his behalf, he remained jailed on a three-year sentence. In April 2006 Shandong Province pastor Liu Yuhua was detained in Linchu County on similar charges of operating an illegal business after he was found distributing religious texts. In May Anhui Province house church pastor Wang Zaiqing was formally arrested. U.S.-based NGOs said the arrest was in connection with his work publishing Bibles and religious materials.

Gong Shengliang and several other leaders of the unregistered South China Church, which the Government considered to be a cult, reportedly continued to suffer abuse in prison during the period covered by this report. Sentenced to death in 2001 on criminal charges including rape, arson, and assault, Gong Shengliang, Xiu Fuming, and Hu Yong had their sentences reduced to life in prison on retrial in 2002. Li Ying and Gong Bang Kun had their sentences reduced from death to fifteen years in prison. Four female church members who signed statements accusing Gong of sexual crimes were rearrested in 2002 and sentenced to three years' reeducation-through-labor, reportedly for recanting their accusations against Gong. There were reports that Gong suffered physical abuse in prison, in part for refusing to abandon his religious beliefs. Elderly church member Chen Jingmao reportedly was abused in a Chongqing prison for attempting to convert inmates to Christianity. Authorities prevented lawyers for both men from meeting with their clients in jail and from filing appeals on behalf of both men.

Following a 2004 crackdown, more than seventeen members of the Three Grades of Servants Church, which the Government labels a "cult," went on trial for murder and other crimes in late 2005 and early 2006. The alleged murders resulted from a conflict between the church and the Eastern Lightning group, which the Government considers a cult.

Xu Shuangfu, leader of the Three Grades of Servants, was convicted of murder in June and, along with church members Li Maoxing and Wang Jun, was sentenced to death. Zhang Min, Zhu Lixing, and Ben Zhonghai received suspended death sentences, and eleven other church members were sentenced to jail terms of three to fifteen years. Even before the verdict in Xu's case had been announced, Xu's conviction was introduced as evidence in the trials of several other group members, according to reliable reports. Many detained or charged with membership in the cult did not use the name Three Grades of Servants Church in describing what they viewed as their own unaffiliated house church.

A number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during the reporting period prompting Vatican officials to make formal protests. In some locations, local authorities reportedly have forced unregistered priests and believers to choose between joining the official Church and facing punishment such as fines, job loss, periodic detentions, and having their children barred from school. Some Catholic officials were forced into hiding. Ongoing harassment of unregistered bishops and priests was reported in recent years, including government surveillance and repeated short detentions. Many of those harassed and detained were more than seventy years old.

Numerous detentions of unofficial Catholic clergy were reported, in particular in Hebei Province, traditionally home to many unregistered Catholics. The Government detained unregistered Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hebei, for the eighth time since 2004 and held him for five months. Security authorities detained more than a dozen other priests and seminarians the same month in Zhengding, including Father Yang Jianwei, who remained detained. On September 2 2005, officials reportedly detained two priests from Qingyuan County, Hebei. In November more than a dozen unregistered priests and seminarians were detained across Hebei Province. In January 2006 Father Huo Junlong was reportedly released but kept under house arrest. There was no new information about unregistered Bishop Su Zhimin, who has been unaccounted for since his reported detention in 1997. Reliable reports suggested that he had been held in a government-run guesthouse or an old-age home near Baoding, Hebei Province. The Government continued to deny taking coercive measures against him. In June 2006, an unverified press report circulated that Bishop Su had died in custody. The Government had not responded to requests to clarify his status by the end of the reporting period. Reliable sources also reported that Bishop An Shuxin, Bishop Zhang Weizhu, Father Cui Xing, and Father Wang Qianjun remained detained in Hebei Province. According to reliable reports, Bishop An, Bishop Su's auxiliary bishop, was last seen four years ago. According to the U.S.-based Cardinal Kung Foundation, the whereabouts of Bishops Yao Liang and Zhao Zhendong, detained in past years, remained unknown, while Bishops Fan Zhongliang and Liu Guandong remained under strict surveillance.

Some unregistered Catholic and Protestant leaders reported that the Government organized campaigns to compel them to register, resulting in continued and, in some cases, increased pressure to register their congregations. Officials organizing registration campaigns collected the names, addresses, and sometimes the fingerprints of church leaders and worshippers. On some occasions, church officials were detained when they arrived for meetings called by authorities to discuss registration.

The whereabouts of Buddhist leader Yu Tianjian remained unknown after his August 2004 detention near Tongliao, Inner Mongolia.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts against the few citizens who consider themselves Jewish or against the foreign Jewish community. The Government does not recognize Judaism as an ethnicity or religion. Past restrictions on public display of artifacts by the local Jewish community in Kaifeng have ended, and several academic institutes opened centers for Jewish study in the country.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the number of believers of all religions continued to grow. The Government authorized funding to build new places of worship, and the first new churches built in Beijing since 1949 opened.

The Government responded to many diplomatic requests for greater engagement with the international community on religious freedom issues. As noted above, in 2005, it made public statements that family and friends are free to hold prayer meetings in their own homes, although the Government stated that it would require that formal worship take place in a registered venue.

In April 2006, the Government and the Patriotic Buddhist Association hosted the First World Buddhist Forum in Hangzhou, billed as the first international religious conference in the country since the 1949 Communist Revolution. More than 1,200 Buddhists, mostly ethnic Chinese, from 34 countries attended the session, which aimed to outline

Buddhism's response to social challenges of modern society. The Government-approved Panchen Lama spoke, but the Dalai Lama and his chosen Panchen Lama were not invited to attend (see appendix on Tibetan areas). In 2006 the Government also supported an exhibition of the Government-approved Bible, which toured internationally, including to the United States.

Tibetan nun Phuntsog Nyidrol, who had been detained in 1989 for marching in support of the Dalai Lama and had her sentence extended after recording pro-Dalai Lama songs in prison, was permitted to travel to the United States to receive medical care in March 2006. She had been released from prison in February 2004 and her parole expired in February 2005, but she was not permitted to travel freely, participate in religious life, or receive medical care (see appendix on Tibetan areas).

On April 19 2006, unregistered Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hebei, was released from custody and allowed to return home, but remained under twenty-four hour police supervision.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The communities of the five main religions--Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism--coexisted without significant friction. The Government preached religious harmony as part of its efforts to build a "harmonious society." However, in some parts of the country, there was a tense relationship between registered and unregistered Christian churches and, according to press reports, between some members of unregistered church groups. There were reports of divisions within both the official Protestant church and the house church movement over issues of doctrine; in both the registered and unregistered Protestant churches, there are conservative and more liberal groups. In other areas, the two groups coexisted without problems. In some provinces, including Hebei, unregistered and official Catholic communities sometimes had a tense relationship. Tensions also existed between domestic Muslim groups and groups following teachings imported from the Middle East. In the past, Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists have complained about the presence of Christian missionaries in their communities. Christian officials reported some friction in rural areas between adherents of folk religions and Christians who view some folk religion practices as idol worship. In general, the majority of the population shows little interest in religious activities beyond visiting temples during festivals or churches on Christmas Eve or Easter. Religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetans and Uighurs, experienced societal discrimination not only because of their religious beliefs but also because of their status as ethnic minorities with languages and cultures different from the typically wealthier Han Chinese. There was also occasional tension between the Han and the Hui, a Muslim ethnic group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. embassy in Beijing, and the consulates general in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country, focusing attention on abuses and supporting positive trends within the country. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with leaders, including in his November 2005 visit to Beijing and his April 2006 meeting with President Hu Jintao in Washington. While in Beijing, President Bush attended a worship service at a registered church. In May 2006 President Bush met with three Christian intellectuals who are leaders in the house church movement. Secretary of State Rice discussed religious freedom and attended a worship service at a registered church during her March 2005 visit to Beijing. In exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, diplomatic personnel consistently urged both central and local authorities to respect citizens' rights to religious freedom and release all those serving prison sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested vigorously whenever there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and they requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. At the same time, U.S. officials argued to the country's leaders that freedom of religion would strengthen, not harm, the country.

The U.S. embassy and consulates also collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within the country's religious communities, including bishops, priests, and ministers of the official Christian and Catholic churches, as well as Taoist, Muslim, and Buddhist leaders. U.S. officials also met with leaders and members of the unofficial Christian churches. The U.S. Department of State's nongovernmental contacts included experts on religion in the country, human rights organizations, and religious groups in the United States.

The Department of State brought a number of religious leaders and scholars to the United States on international visitor programs to see firsthand the role that religion plays in U.S. society. The embassy also brought experts on religion from the United States to the country to speak about the role of religion in American life and public policy.

During the period covered by this report, the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, which had included religious freedom as a major agenda item, remained suspended. The most recent dialogue session took place in December 2002.

During the period covered by this report, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Barry Lowenkron traveled to the country to discuss human rights and religious freedom issues with the Government.

Ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr. highlighted problems of religious freedom and cases of individual religious prisoners of conscience in his public speeches and in his private diplomacy with officials. East Asian and Pacific Affairs Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill also raised religious freedom issues, including cases of concern, with officials. Staff members of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, including of the Office for International Religious Freedom, also traveled to the country to discuss religious freedom issues. They met with government officials responsible for religion and with clergy or practitioners in official and unofficial religious groups.

In June 2006 in Washington, Assistant Secretary Lowenkron met with Uighur Muslim activist Rebiya Kadeer, and Ambassador at large for International Religious Freedom John V. Hanford III met with Tibetan Buddhist nun Phuntsog Nyidrol.

U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing continued to protest individual incidents of abuse. On numerous occasions, the U.S. Department of State, the embassy, and the four consulates in the country protested government actions to curb freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, including the arrests of Falun Gong followers, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, and Catholic and Protestant clergy and believers. The embassy routinely raised reported cases of detention and abuse of religious practitioners with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Administration of Religious Affairs.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated the country as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Economic measures in effect against the country under the IRFA relate to restriction of exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment (Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, P.L. 101-246).

HONG KONG

The Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitution, provides for freedom of religion, and its Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination. The Government generally respected these provisions in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Six of the largest religious groups have long collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up a joint conference of religious leaders.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Hong Kong Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) occupies 422 square miles on more than 200 islands and the mainland and its population was an estimated 6.9 million. Approximately 43 percent of the population participated in some form of religious practice. The two largest religions were Buddhism and Taoism, which were often celebrated together in the same temple. Hong Kong was home to approximately 700 thousand Buddhists or Taoists, 320 thousand Protestant Christians, 240 thousand Roman Catholics, and 100 thousand Muslims. There were small numbers of Hindus, Sikhs, and approximately 4 thousand practicing Jews. Many persons also held Confucian beliefs, although few practiced it as a formal religion. Representatives of the spiritual movement Falun Gong stated that their practitioners numbered approximately 500; however, HKSAR government officials claimed the number was lower.

Hong Kong's Protestants had 1,350 congregations representing 50 denominations. The largest Protestant denomination was the Baptist Church, followed by the Lutheran Church. Other major denominations included Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, Christian and Missionary Alliance groups, the Church of Christ in China, Methodists, and Pentecostals. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) was also present.

There were approximately 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, an estimated 800 Christian churches and chapels, 5 mosques, 1 Hindu temple, 1 Sikh temple, and 3 synagogues. Catholics were served by 1 cardinal (appointed in 2006), 1 bishop, 299 priests, 66 monks, and 529 nuns, all of whom maintained traditional links to the Vatican. The assistant secretary general of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference had his office in Hong Kong. Along with its apostolic work, the Catholic Church was engaged in a broad array of social service activities. It operated 317 schools and kindergartens that enrolled more than 264 thousand children. In addition it operated six hospitals, fifteen clinics, twelve social centers, nineteen hostels, thirteen homes for the aged, and nineteen rehabilitation centers. Protestant churches were also deeply involved in education, health care, and social welfare. They ran 3 colleges, 703 schools and nurseries, 7 hospitals, 18 clinics, 35 homes for the elderly, 47 centers for the disabled, and scores of youth and day care centers. Various Muslim organizations also offered medical care, education, and financial aid to the needy. Some religious leaders and communities maintained active contacts with their mainland and international counterparts. Catholic and Protestant clergy were invited to give seminars on the mainland, teach classes there, and develop two-

way student exchanges on an ongoing basis. Numerous foreign missionary groups operated in and out of the HKSAR.

A wide range of faiths was represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service. A large number of influential non-Christians have been educated in Christian schools.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law provides for freedom of religion, and the Bill of Rights Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination by the HKSAR Government. The Government does not tolerate the abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors. Hong Kong has been a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since July 1, 1997, but according to the Basic Law, the HKSAR enjoys a high degree of autonomy in the area of religious freedom under the "one country, two systems" concept. The Government does not recognize a state religion, and a wide range of faiths are represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government and are exempted specifically from the Societies Ordinance, which requires the registration of nongovernmental organizations. Catholics in the HKSAR recognize the pope as the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

Religious groups wishing to purchase a site to construct a school or hospital initiate their request with the Lands Department. Church-affiliated schools make their request to the Education and Manpower Bureau. Church-affiliated hospitals do so with the Health and Welfare Bureau. For other matters, the Home Affairs Bureau functions as a liaison between religious groups and the Government. During the reporting period, a Muslim group comprised primarily of residents of South Asian ethnicity complained that the Government had unfairly levied a \$1.3 million (HK\$10 million) land use fee on the construction of a new mosque. They argued that a similar-sized project by an ethnic Chinese charity was charged a fee of only \$130 (HK\$1,000). The Government denied that it had acted unfairly and said the two projects fell into different zoning categories. The Government argued that zoning regulations did not discriminate based on religion or ethnicity. The Muslim group provided no further reaction following the Government's explanation. Although not alleging discrimination, a Jewish group complained that the Government was insensitive to its attempts to find a location in the expensive central district to build a new synagogue.

The Election Committee Ordinance stipulates that the six largest religious groups in Hong Kong (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Roman Catholic, Muslim, and Anglican) hold forty seats on the eight hundred-member Election Committee, which chooses the HKSAR's chief executive. These forty representatives are chosen by the leaders of the various religious groups.

The Government grants public holidays to mark special religious days on the traditional Chinese and Christian calendars, including Christmas and Buddha's Birthday.

Religious groups have a long history of cooperating with the Government on social welfare projects. For example, the Government often funds the operating costs of schools and hospitals built by religious groups. The Catholic Church complained that an education bill passed in 2004 limited its control over Catholic schools. The law requires each school that receives government funding to establish a management board and mandates that 40 percent of the board's members be elected by teacher and parent groups. The sponsoring body can appoint the remaining 60 percent. The Catholic Church argued that this interfered with its ability to manage the schools and set curriculum.

The Falun Gong, which considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is registered under the Societies Ordinance. Falun Gong practitioners were able to stage public demonstrations and practice freely. Falun Gong practitioners regularly conducted public protests against the crackdown on fellow practitioners in the PRC. In May 2005 the Court of Final Appeal overturned convictions of eight Falun Gong practitioners who had been charged with obstructing and assaulting police officers during a sit-in protest in 2002. The ruling was widely viewed by observers as an important affirmation of Hong Kong's fundamental freedom of assembly, demonstration, and expression under the basic law. As of May 2006 the Court of Final Appeal had not issued a ruling on the complaint by four Falun Gong members (and the Falun Gong branch of Hong Kong) who were denied entry into the HKSAR for "security reasons" in 2004. The four were trying to attend Falun Gong's annual conference. The HKSAR denied entry to 41 practitioners, but permitted approximately 350 other practitioners to enter the HKSAR and attend the conference. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Xiang Gong and Yan Xin Qigong, were also registered and practiced freely in the HKSAR.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not have jurisdiction over religious practices in the HKSAR.

The Basic Law calls for ties between Hong Kong religious organizations and their mainland counterparts to be based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect."

In March 2006 the Vatican appointed then Bishop Joseph Zen, the head of Hong Kong's Catholic Diocese, to the post of cardinal. The PRC Government responded by warning Cardinal Zen to refrain from commenting on Hong Kong political matters. Despite this, Cardinal Zen remained an outspoken critic of both mainland and HKSAR policies and a strong advocate of religious freedom. When the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association appointed two bishops on the mainland against the wishes of the Vatican in April and May 2006, Cardinal Zen responded that in "China there is only one Catholic Church, and everyone wants to be led by the pope."

Falun Gong is generally free to practice, organize, conduct public demonstrations, and attract public attention for its movement. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in the HKSAR was reported to have dropped from approximately 1,000 to an estimated 500 since the crackdown on the mainland began in mid-1999, although government officials claimed that the number was lower for both periods. During the period covered by this report, Falun Gong regularly conducted public protests against the repression of fellow practitioners in the PRC near the Hong Kong offices of the PRC government.

Unlike in previous years, during the reporting period there were no reports that Falun Gong members were denied entry into Hong Kong.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

Two ecumenical bodies facilitate cooperative work among the Protestant churches and encourage local Christians to play an active part in society. Six of the largest religious groups (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Muslim) long have collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up the joint conference of religious leaders.

While Falun Gong practitioners freely and openly practiced their beliefs, they were occasionally subjected to more subtle forms of discrimination from private businesses in Hong Kong. In September 2005 the Falun Gong's daily newspaper Epoch Times reported that an international hotel chain canceled its conference room booking due to a water leak. The newspaper had booked the room for a forum on the future of China. A Falun Gong spokesperson said that once it became widely known that the Falun Gong had sponsored the conference, a replacement facility could not be found. The group later held the forum in a public park. This is the second time in three years that an international hotel chain canceled a Falun Gong conference room booking. In 2004 a private hotel canceled a Falun Gong banquet room booking because of the group's "terrorist risk," according to Falun Gong representatives. Falun Gong successfully sued the hotel in small claims court.

In February 2006 four men used sledgehammers to break into the Hong Kong office of the Falun Gong-owned newspaper Epoch Times and destroyed an expensive piece of machinery in the paper's print shop. Police investigated the incident but made no arrests. Falun Gong claimed the attack was part of a worldwide campaign against the group by the Chinese Communist Party. The Hong Kong Journalists Association, the International Federation of Journalists, and several Hong Kong legislators condemned the break-in. After brief initial reports in local daily newspapers, the incident received no follow-up media coverage.

Falun Gong had opened the print shop only two weeks prior to the break-in after experiencing difficulties in finding a local company willing to print their paper. In May 2005 the private printing company the paper had been using refused to renew its contract. Falun Gong alleged the company feared business reprisals from its mainland clients. Falun Gong quickly found another printing company, although the company refused to sign a written contract, and orders had to be placed orally each day. According to Falun Gong representatives, at least ten other printing companies refused to print the paper. Following the February 2006 break-in, which disabled the print shop, Falun Gong was able to hire a printing company to continue publication of its paper, although orders again had to be placed on a day-to-day basis.

On May 12, 2006, Yu Jie, Li Baiguang, and Wang Yi, three Christian intellectuals, met with President Bush at the White House. The following day, Yu and Li received e-mails from the China Graduate School of Theology (CGST) stating that their scheduled study program had become "unsuitable" due to a certain event that had attracted international attention. On May 15 the Government stated that it had no role in CGST's decision to rescind the invitation to Yu and Li. Yu Jie subsequently visited Hong Kong and participated in public activities while there.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the HKSAR Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Consulate general officers have made clear U.S. government interest in the full protection and maintenance of freedom of religion, conscience, expression, and association. Consulate general officers at all levels, including the consul general, meet regularly with religious leaders and community representatives.

MACAU

The Basic Law, which is the constitution of the Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR), and the Religious Freedom Ordinance provide for freedom of religion and prohibit discrimination on the basis of religious practice, and the Macau SAR Government generally respected these rights in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and Macau SAR government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The Macau SAR has a total area of thirteen square miles, and its population is approximately 453 thousand. According to 1996 census figures on religious affiliation, which are the latest available, of the more than 355 thousand persons surveyed, 60.9 percent had no religious affiliation, 16.8 percent were Buddhist, 13.9 percent were "other" (followers of combinations of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian beliefs), 6.7 percent were Roman Catholic, and 1.7 percent were Protestant. The number of active Falun Gong practitioners declined from approximately one hundred persons to an estimated twenty after the movement was banned in mainland China in 1999. There were approximately one hundred Muslims. The SAR had an estimated fifty Buddhist and Taoist temples, sixty Christian churches (of which sixteen are Catholic), and one mosque.

Missionaries were active in Macau and represented a wide range of faiths, although the majority was Catholic.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law, the Macau SAR's constitution, provides for freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach, and freedom to conduct and participate in religious activities. The Religious Freedom Ordinance, which remained in effect after the 1999 handover of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (PRC), provides for freedom of religion, privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. The Government generally respected these rights in practice.

There is no state religion.

The Religious Freedom Ordinance requires religious organizations to register with the Identification Services Office. There were no reports of discrimination in the registration process.

Missionaries were free to conduct missionary activities. Nearly forty thousand children are enrolled in Macau's thirty Catholic schools, and a large number of influential non-Christians have been educated in Christian schools. Religious entities can apply to use electronic media to preach, and such applications are generally approved.

The Religious Freedom Ordinance stipulates that religious groups may maintain and develop relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church in Macau recognizes the Pope as the head of the church. In 2003 the Holy See appointed the current coadjutor bishop for the Macau diocese.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not govern religious practices in the Macau SAR. The Basic Law states, "The Government of the Macau Special Administrative Region, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or in the efforts of religious organizations and believers in Macau to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau, or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the region."

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government and are exempt specifically from the Societies Ordinance, which requires the registration of all other nongovernmental organizations. However, the Falun Gong, although it considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is not registered under the Societies Ordinance. Neither is Falun Gong registered with the Identification Services Office, which has issued no instructions regarding the Falun Gong. Nevertheless, senior SAR Government officials have stated that, despite this lack of registration under the Religious Freedom Ordinance, Falun Gong practitioners may continue their legal activities without government interference. Falun Gong practitioners continued their daily exercises in public parks, where the police observed them once or twice a month and checked identification, according to Falun Gong followers.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports during the reporting period of Falun Gong members being denied entry into the SAR. Falun Gong representatives had previously claimed that they were denied entry into Macau, especially during sensitive political periods. For example, in January 2005 Macau immigration officials refused to allow a prominent Falun Gong representative from Hong Kong to enter Macau following the death of former PRC Communist Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations among the various religious communities were very good. Citizens generally were very tolerant of other's religious views and practices. Public ceremonies and dedications often included prayers by both Christian and Buddhist groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officers from the U.S. consulate general in Hong Kong met regularly with leaders of all religious groups and spiritual organizations in Macau.

TIBET

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous counties and prefectures in other provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China. The Department of State follows these designations in its reporting. The preservation and development of the Tibetan people's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage and the protection of their fundamental human rights continue to be of concern.

The constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief, and the Government's 2005 White Paper on "Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China" states, "Organs of self-government in autonomous areas, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and relevant laws, respect and guarantee the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities, and safeguard all legal and normal religious activities of people of ethnic minorities." However, the Government maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although the authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed activities they viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, such as religious activities venerating the Dalai Lama (which the Government described as "splittist").

Overall, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report; however, the atmosphere for religious freedom varied from region to region. Conditions were generally more relaxed in Tibetan autonomous areas outside the TAR, with the exception of parts of Sichuan's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Envoys of the Dalai Lama made visits to China for discussions with Government officials in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 and met with Government officials in Switzerland in 2005. There was a report of the death of a monk from Drepung Monastery in October 2005 following a heated dispute with the monastery's "work team" over his refusal to denounce the Dalai Lama. Although in the past there were reports of the deaths of monks and nuns due to maltreatment in prison, there were no known reports during the period covered by this report. Buddhist leaders such as Gendun Choekyi Nyima and Tenzin Delek remained in detention or prison, and the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama remained in exile. Dozens of monks and nuns continued to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic" or political education. The Government refused free access to Tibetan areas for international observers, tightly controlled observers who were granted access, and tightly controlled publication of information about conditions in Tibet. These restrictions made it impossible to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations.

While there was some friction between Tibetan Buddhists and the growing Muslim Hui population in cities of the

Tibetan areas, it was attributable more to economic competition and cultural differences than to religious tensions. The Christian population in the TAR was extremely small. Some converts to Christianity may have encountered societal pressure.

The U.S. government continued to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas by urging the Central Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom and preserve religious traditions. The U.S. government protested credible reports of religious persecution and discrimination, discussed specific cases with the authorities, and requested further information about specific incidents.

Section I. Religious Demography

The Tibetan areas of China have an area of 871,649 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas was 5,354,540; the Tibetan population within the TAR was 2.4 million, while in autonomous prefectures and counties outside the TAR the Tibetan population was 2.9 million. Most Tibetans practiced Tibetan Buddhism and, to a lesser extent, the traditional Tibetan Bon religion. This held true for many Tibetan government officials and Communist Party members. Bon includes beliefs and ceremonies that practitioners believe predate the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet in the seventh century. Other residents of Tibetan areas who were religious believers included Han Chinese, who practiced Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and traditional folk religions; Hui Muslims; Tibetan Muslims; and Christians. There are four mosques in the TAR with approximately 4,000 to 5,000 Muslim adherents, as well as a Catholic church with 560 parishioners, which is located in the traditionally Catholic community of Yanjing in the eastern TAR. There were a small number of Falun Gong adherents in Tibet.

The Government's 2005 White Paper stated that, by the end of 2003, there were 1,700 sites in the TAR for Buddhists to conduct religious activities, and approximately 46,000 resident monks and nuns. This figure has been cited since 1996, although the numbers of monks and nuns dropped at many sites as a result of the patriotic education and the expulsion from monasteries and nunneries of many monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama or who were found to be "politically unqualified."

These numbers represented only the TAR, where the number of monks and nuns was very strictly controlled. According to statistics collected by the China Center for Tibetan Studies, a government research institution, there were 1,535 monasteries in Tibetan areas outside the TAR. Informed observers estimated that a total of 60,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns lived in Tibetan areas outside the TAR.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government sought to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of the activity of religious groups. The Government remained wary of Tibetan Buddhism in general and its links to the Dalai Lama, and it maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed any activities, which they viewed as vehicles for political dissent. This included religious activities that officials perceived as supporting the Dalai Lama or Tibetan independence.

In 2005 the State Council introduced new religious affairs regulations that superseded the Government's 1994 regulations on the management of religious sites. The regulations' preamble stated that the provisions aim to protect freedom of religious belief, maintain harmony between different religions and society, and regulate religious affairs throughout the country. On January 17, 2005, according to a Chinese Government website, TAR Vice Chairman Jagra Lobsang Tenzin told a meeting of TAR officials that the regulations provided "a legal weapon to resist foreign forces' taking advantage of religion to infiltrate our country." In January 2006 the official website of Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province announced that it would strengthen the management of religious work by inspecting monasteries to look for elements of instability, enforce controls and collect data on monks and nuns who illegally enter and exit the region, destroy 853 illegal houses and dismiss 1,100 monks and nuns from Yachen Monastery, and destroy 74 illegal houses in Serthar Larang Gar Monastery. An April 2006 report on the same website reiterated that people who illegally exit and reenter the region would be required to register with the authorities.

Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy, and several other representatives met with Chinese authorities in Bern, Switzerland, in June 2005 and visited Guilin City, China, in February 2006. On previous visits in 2002, 2003, and 2004, Gyari and Kelsang Gyaltsen, the Dalai Lama's envoy, traveled to Beijing, Lhasa, Shanghai, and Tibetan areas of Yunnan Province. The Government asserted that the door to dialogue and negotiation was open, provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirmed that Tibet and Taiwan were inseparable parts of China.

Since the establishment of the TAR in 1965, the Government asserted that it has spent more than \$74 million (RMB 600 million) for restoration of the TAR's Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, many of which were destroyed before and

during the Cultural Revolution. In 2005-06, the Government largely completed projects it undertook in 2002 to restore the TAR's three most prominent cultural sites: the Potala Palace, the Norbulingka (another former residence of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa), and Sakya Monastery (the seat of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism in rural southern TAR).

Despite these and other efforts, many monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution have not been rebuilt or repaired, and others remained only partially repaired. The Government stated that funding restoration efforts was done to support the practice of religion, but it also was done in part to promote the development of tourism in Tibetan areas. Most recent restoration efforts were funded privately, although a few religious sites also were receiving government support for reconstruction projects at the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government officials closely associated Buddhist monasteries with proindependence activism in Tibetan areas of China. Spiritual leaders encountered difficulty re-establishing historical monasteries due to lack of funds, general limitations on monastic education, and denials of government permission to build and operate religious institutions, which officials in some areas contended were a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. The Government stated that there were no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, and that each monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC) decided independently how many monks the monastery could support. Many of these committees were government-controlled, and in practice the Government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, particularly in the TAR. The Government had the right to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders; however, the Government did not necessarily exercise this right in practice during the year. Authorities curtailed the traditional practice of sending young boys to monasteries for religious training by means of regulations that forbade monasteries from accepting individuals under the age of eighteen. Nevertheless, some monasteries continued to admit younger boys, often delaying their formal registration until the age of eighteen.

The Government continued to oversee the daily operations of major monasteries. The Government, which did not contribute to the monasteries' operating funds, retained management control of monasteries through the DMCs and local religious affairs bureaus. Regulations restricted leadership of many DMCs to "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns and specified that the Government must approve all members of the committees. At some monasteries, government officials were members of the committees.

The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in the TAR and other Tibetan areas remained inadequate; many teachers were in exile, older teachers were not being replaced, and those remaining in Tibetan areas outside the TAR had difficulty securing permission to teach in the TAR. In recent years, DMCs at several large monasteries began to use funds generated by the sales of entrance tickets or donated by pilgrims for purposes other than the support of monks engaged in full-time religious study. As a result, some "scholar monks" who had formerly been fully supported had to engage in income-generating activities. Some experts were concerned that, as a result, fewer monks would be qualified to serve as teachers in the future. While local government officials' attempts to attract tourists to religious sites provided some monasteries with extra income, they also deflected time and energy from religious instruction. There were reports of disagreements between monastic leaders and government officials over visitors, vehicle traffic, and culturally inappropriate construction near monastic sites. In July 2004 authorities permitted resumption of the Geshe Lharampa examinations, the highest religious examination in the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, at Lhasa's Jokhang Temple for the first time in sixteen years. According to officials in the TAR, six monks in the TAR passed the Geshe Lharampa exam in 2004 and seven passed in 2005.

Government officials have stated that the patriotic education campaign, which began in 1996 and often consisted of intensive, weeks-long sessions conducted by outside work teams, ended in 2000. However, officials stated openly that monks and nuns undergo political education on a regular basis, generally less than four times a year, but occasionally more frequently, at their religious sites. Since primary responsibility for conducting political education shifted from government officials to monastery leaders, the form, content, and frequency of training at each monastery appeared to vary widely; however, conducting such training remained a requirement and had become a routine part of monastic management.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 3,395 Tibetan new arrivals approached UNHCR in Nepal during the year; 3,352 Tibetans departed for India, of whom 2,340 received UNHCR transit assistance, and 1,012 Tibetans left for India by their own means. Many Tibetans, particularly those from rural areas, continued to report difficulties obtaining passports. The application process was not transparent, and residents of different Tibetan areas reported obstacles ranging from bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption to denials based on the applicant's political activities or beliefs. Police in China have stated that passport regulations permit them to deny passports to those whose travel will "harm the national security and national interests."

Due in part to the difficulties faced by many Tibetans in obtaining passports, and in part to the difficulty many Chinese citizens of Tibetan ethnicity encountered obtaining entry visas for India, it was difficult for Tibetans to travel to India for religious purposes. The Government placed restrictions on the movement of Tibetans during sensitive anniversaries and events and increased controls over border areas at these times. There were reports of arbitrary detention that lasted several months, although in most cases no formal charges were brought. There were also reports of the torture of persons, particularly monks, returning from Nepal and India. There were also reports that Government officials

asked family members for bribes in exchange for the release of tortured returnees. Returned exiles reported that authorities pressured them not to discuss issues that the Government characterized as politically sensitive, such as the Dalai Lama.

In September 2005 Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that Chinese border forces opened fire on a group of fifty-one Tibetan asylum-seekers trying to travel to Nepal by way of Dhangri, in Shigatse Prefecture. All but three were taken into custody and their whereabouts remained unknown. The group included six children between the ages of ten and eleven, two nuns, and one monk. In November 2005 the Tibet Information Network (TIN) reported the detention in the TAR of fourteen Tibetans from Amdo who were attempting to travel to India via Nepal. Nevertheless, many Tibetans, including monks and nuns, visited India via third countries and returned to China after temporary stays. In 2006, there was a considerable increase in the number of Tibetans traveling from China to the Dalai Lama's Kalachakra ceremony in India. There were reports that Tibetans returning to China from the Kalachakra celebration were being monitored closely by authorities and indications that monks and nuns in some Tibetan areas in Sichuan were required to register upon their return.

During the Kalachakra ceremony the Dalai Lama appealed to Tibetans to protect wildlife by giving up traditional animal-skin-lined clothing. In response to and as a show of support for the Dalai Lama, groups of Tibetans in Eastern Tibetan areas, including Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu Provinces, held large ceremonies to burn animal pelts. Chinese authorities subsequently prohibited the public burnings and detained some participants, who were later released. Press reports noted that authorities in some areas pressured Tibetans in high-profile positions to continue wearing fur-trimmed traditional clothing.

In June 2006 authorities in Sichuan's Ganzi Prefecture reportedly initiated a political reeducation campaign for school children. Soldiers in uniform entered a school and said that Tibetans were not permitted to burn animal skins. They reportedly asked students whether they supported the Dalai Lama. Those who said they did not were encouraged to trample a picture of the Dalai Lama. TIN reported that seventeen students were detained for showing respect to the Dalai Lama.

The Karmapa Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kagyu sect and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, remained in exile following his 1999 flight to India. The Karmapa Lama stated that he fled because of the Government's controls on his movements and its refusal either to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or to allow his teachers to come to him. Visitors to Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Lama, noted that the population of monks remained small and the atmosphere was subdued.

The Government routinely asserted control over the process of identifying and educating reincarnated lamas. For example, the Government authorities closely supervised the current Reting Rinpoche, who is seven years old, and his education differed significantly from that of his predecessors.

The Government also strictly restricted contacts between reincarnate lamas and the outside world. For example, young incarnate lama Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa Lama in 1994, lived under government supervision at Nenang Monastery. Foreign delegations have been refused permission to visit him.

Government officials maintained that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama was not illegal and that most TAR residents chose not to display his picture. Nevertheless, authorities appeared to view possession of such photos as evidence of separatist sentiment when detaining individuals on political charges. Pictures of the Dalai Lama were not openly displayed in major monasteries and could not be purchased openly in the TAR. In Tibetan areas outside the TAR, visitors to several monasteries saw pictures of the Dalai Lama openly displayed. The Government continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama. Photos of the "official" Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, were not publicly displayed in most places, most likely because most Tibetans refuse to recognize him as the Panchen Lama.

Many Tibetan Buddhist religious figures held positions in local People's Congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Nevertheless, the Government continued to insist that Communist Party members and senior employees adhere to the Party's code of atheism, and routine political training for cadres continued to promote atheism. Government officials confirmed that some Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officers were members of the Communist Party and that religious belief was incompatible with Party membership. This prohibition notwithstanding, some lower-level RAB officials practiced Buddhism.

Security was intensified during the Dalai Lama's birthday, sensitive anniversaries, and festival days in the TAR and in some other Tibetan areas. The prohibition on celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6 continued. The Government reportedly altered traditional dates of Tibetan festivals such as the Drepun Shoton Festival, and in June, there were press reports that authorities in Amdo (Gansu Province) cancelled the Kalachakra religious ceremony that was scheduled to be held there on July 6. Tibetans in Amdo had reportedly received permission in 2005 to hold the ceremony in 2006. In June, some Tibetans were ordered not to visit temples and monasteries during the Saka Dawa Festival. Some government employees were told that they would lose their jobs or have their wages reduced if they disobeyed this order.

Travel restrictions for foreign visitors to and within the TAR were reported during the period covered by this report. The Government tightly controlled visits by foreign officials to religious sites in the TAR, and official foreign delegations had few opportunities to meet monks and nuns in Tibetan areas that were not previously approved by the local authorities.

In 2004 the Government also restricted access to the Serthar Buddhist Study Institute in Western Sichuan after the death of charismatic Tibetan leader, Jigme Phuntsog. Authorities also pressured monastic leaders to delay the search for Jigme Phuntsog's reincarnation. Also in 2004, Tibetan and Chinese intellectuals successfully petitioned to stop Han Chinese sportsman Zhang Jian from swimming across Lake Namtso in the TAR, a lake believed by many Tibetan Buddhists to be sacred.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government strictly controlled access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and it was difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. While the atmosphere for lay religious practice was less restrictive than in the recent past, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high, and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

In early October 2005 Ngawang Jangchub, a twenty-eight year-old Tibetan monk, was found dead in his room at the Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. According to reports, Ngawang Jangchub's death followed a heated dispute with the monastery's "work team" over his refusal to denounce the Dalai Lama. Government officials claimed Ngawang Jangchub's death was due to natural causes.

The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltzen Norbu, sixteen, the boy it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama's eleventh reincarnation. The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, seventeen, the boy recognized as the eleventh Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama in 1995 (when the boy was six years old), and his whereabouts were unknown. Government officials claimed that the boy was under government supervision, at an undisclosed location, for his own protection and attends classes as a "normal schoolboy." All requests from the international community for access to the boy to confirm his well-being have been refused.

Gyaltzen Norbu traveled to Lhasa and Ganden Monastery in October 2005 and gave head-touching blessings to monks. In December 2005, the Government celebrated the tenth anniversary of Gyaltzen Norbu's enthronement in his seat, the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse Prefecture in the TAR. During that ceremony, Gyaltzen Norbu performed a head-touching blessing for people in the monastery. Gyaltzen Norbu spoke before 1,000 international participants at the April 2006 World Buddhist Forum held in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, and called for national unity and patriotism, according to official press reports. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists continued to recognize Gendun Choekyi Nyima as the Panchen Lama.

Lama Chadrel Rinpoche, released in 2002 after six years and six months in prison for leaking information about the selection of the Panchen Lama, was reportedly still under house arrest near Lhasa. Government officials did not confirm his whereabouts and continued to refuse requests from the international community to meet with him.

Authorities in Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture continued to ignore international calls for an inquiry into the death of monk Nyima Dragpa, who allegedly died from severe beatings while in government custody in October 2003. Officials did not provide any new information on Champa Chung, former assistant of Chadrel Rinpoche who was reportedly still held in custody after the expiration of his prison term in 1999.

In March 2005 the World Tibet Network News (WTN) reported that local authorities extended Tibetan Buddhist monk Jigme Gyatso's prison term from fifteen to seventeen years. He was arrested in Lhasa in 1996 for alleged "political activities."

In May 2005 according to the London-based Free Tibet Campaign, authorities in the Gansu Province detained three Tibetan nuns and two monks. Nuns Yonten Drolma, Tadrin Tsomo, and Choekyi Drolma and monks Jamyang Samdrub and Dargye Gyatso were reportedly arrested for distributing letters calling for Tibetan independence at a local monastery, market, and other areas. The Congressional Executive Commission on China Political Prisoner Database (CECC PPD) also listed monk Sherab detained as part of this group.

In mid-2005, Tibetan Buddhist monks Dzokar and Topden and layman Lobsang Tsering were reportedly released after serving a portion of a three-year jail term for putting up proindependence posters. They were arrested in September 2004 in Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture. Monks Dzokar and Topden reportedly returned to Chogri Monastery.

RFA reported in June 2005 that local authorities detained Jigme Dasang, a Tibetan monk from Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai Province. No charges were reported during the period covered by this report.

A number of former political prisoners and other suspected activists were reportedly detained in the period prior to the 40th anniversary of the founding of the TAR on September 1, 2005. According to Human Rights Watch, Sonam, a

monk from the Potala Palace, was detained by security forces in August 2005; officials claimed no action had been taken against him. In another case of apparent preventative detention, state security detained a tailor, Sonam Gyalpo, in August 2005 on suspicion of endangering national security. In September 2005 Sonam Gyalpo was officially arrested on charges of separating the country and destroying national unity.

According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), authorities arrested five monks who refused to take part in patriotic education that began in October 2005 at the Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. The monks, who were identified as Ngawang Namdrol, Ngawang Nyingpo, Ngawang Thupten, Ngawang Phelgey, and Phuntsok Thupwang reportedly refused to denounce the Dalai Lama and recognize Tibet as part of China. TAR officials said that the monks were not detained but rather expelled from the monastery. The officials acknowledged that hundreds of monks gathered to petition for their return.

In June 2006 RFA reported that authorities detained five Tibetans, including two Buddhist nuns from Kardze Prefecture, for allegedly handing out leaflets promoting Tibetan independence. In Lhasa, Yiga, a nun and two other women, Sonam Choetso and Jampa Yangtso, were reportedly detained on the first day of the Saga Dawa religious period on May 28. Kayi Doega and Sonam Lhamo, a nun, were reportedly detained in Kardze Prefecture on June 1 and June 2, respectively, on suspicion of organizing the leafleting.

Limited access to information about prisoners and prisons made it difficult to ascertain the number of Tibetan political prisoners or to assess the extent and severity of abuses. According to the Congressional Executive Commission on China Political Prisoner Database (CECC PPD), there were ninety-six Tibetan political prisoners and seventy-one of them monks and nuns. The CECC reported that the number of political prisoners declined to less than one-fifth the number ten years ago.

Approximately fifteen political prisoners remained in TAR Prison (also known as Drapchi Prison) in Lhasa, most serving sentences on the charge of "counterrevolution," which was dropped from the criminal law in 1997. Authorities have stated that acts previously prosecuted as counterrevolutionary crimes continue to be considered crimes under state security laws. According to the CECC PPD, almost half of Tibetan political prisoners were incarcerated in Lhasa and western Sichuan Province.

Prison authorities continued to subject imprisoned monks and nuns to torture.

After her release to the United States in March 2006 on medical parole, Tibetan Buddhist nun Phuntsog Nyidrol, who was detained at Gutsa detention center upon arrest 1989 and then imprisoned in TAR Prison until 2004, reported that she was tortured by government authorities. Phuntsog Nyidrol had received a nine-year sentence for taking part in peaceful demonstrations supporting the Dalai Lama in 1989. In 1993 her sentence was extended to seventeen years after she and other nuns recorded songs about their devotion to Tibet and the Dalai Lama.

Phuntsog Nyidrol also stated that religious prisoners are not allowed to meet with other religious prisoners, use their religious names in prison or recite prayers in prison. Nyidrol also stated that prison administrators deny family visits to religious prisoners as punishment.

Although Tibetan Buddhists in Tibetan areas outside of the TAR enjoy relatively greater freedom of worship than their coreligionists within the TAR, religious expression by Tibetan Buddhists outside the TAR has also at times resulted in detention and arrest.

In January 2005 the Government commuted the death sentence of Tenzin Delek to life in prison. In 2002 Tenzin Delek, a prominent lama from Kardze, was arrested for his alleged connection with a series of bombings in Sichuan Province. On January 26, 2003, Tenzin Delek and his associate, Lobsang Dondrub were sentenced to death for their alleged role in the bombings. The Government executed Lobsang Dondrub on the same day despite reportedly giving assurances to senior diplomatic officials that both would be afforded due process and that their sentences would be reviewed by the national-level Supreme People's Court. Tenzin Delek was being held in Tuandong Prison in Sichuan Province.

TIN reported in April 2006 that Gendun, a Tibetan monk and teacher of traditional monastic dance from Yulung Monastery in Qinghai was sentenced in January 2006 to four years in prison after he gave talks about Tibetan culture and history. Charges are unknown. Twenty other monks, students, and teachers were reportedly detained with Gendun in February 2005, but they were released soon afterwards.

The status of the following persons arrested from 2003 to 2005 remained unconfirmed at year's end: five monks who were arrested in 2003 in Ngaba Prefecture in Sichuan Province and charged with alleged separatist activities; three monks from Kirti Monastery in Sichuan Province who were arrested in 2003 for posting pro-independence posters; two monks from Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture who were arrested in 2004 for displaying the Tibetan national flag; Choeden Rinzen, who was arrested in 2004 for possessing a Tibetan national flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama; Phutnsok Tsering in Magar Dhargyeling Monastery, who was arrested in 2005 for possessing a portrait of the Dalai Lama and writings on Tibetan nationalism; monk Sonam Phuntsok who was detained in 2004 in Sichuan Province on suspicion

of being a Free Tibet activist; and five monks from Dakar Treltzong Monastery in Qinghai Province reportedly arrested in 2005 for publishing politically sensitive poems.

The Government did not provide any new information on the following reports: the whereabouts of Seopa Nagur, chief patron of the Kirti Monastic School that authorities closed in July 2003; the report that police in Qinghai's Golog Prefecture shot and killed Tibetan Buddhist religious leader Shetsul in October 2004 after he and other monks demanded police pay for medical treatment for injuries suffered while in custody. The Government released some prisoners before the end of their sentences.

In January 2005, authorities released Tibetan monk Tashi Phuntsog, who served two years and nine months of his seven-year sentence. Tashi Phuntsog was detained in 2002 following the arrest of Tenzin Delek.

Lhasa orphanage owners Bangri Chogtrul Rinpoche (Jigme Tenzin Nyima) and Nyima Choedron, convicted in 2002 of "espionage and endangering state security," were given sentence reductions in March 2006. Bangri Chogtrul's life sentence was commuted to a fixed term of nineteen years and then reduced by one year; his sentence was due to expire in 2021. Nyima Choedron's ten year sentence for splittism was reduced twice and was set to end in February 2007. She was released early on February 26, 2006.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism. The Christian population in Tibetan areas of China is extremely small. Some converts to Christianity may have encountered societal pressure.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas, using both focused external pressure regarding abuses and support for positive trends within the country. In regular exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, U.S. diplomatic personnel consistently urged both Central Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom in Tibetan areas.

Prior to the March 2006 departure of nun Phuntsog Nyidrol, who was jailed for fifteen 15 years, numerous high-level U.S. officials including the ambassador and the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor raised concerns about her case in meetings with Chinese officials.

In November 2005 the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Torture visited Lhasa to meet with officials and visit two prisons.

Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination. U.S. officials in Washington, Beijing, and Chengdu pressed for specific information on Ngawang Jangchub, a twenty-eight-year-old Tibetan monk who was found dead in his room at the Drepung Monastery in early October 2005; and Sonam, a monk from the Potala Palace in Lhasa who was taken from the palace on August 21, 2005 in what NGOs alleged was a politically motivated detention. Officials asked for and were denied a meeting in Lhasa with Chadrel Rinpoche, reportedly under house arrest since 2002.

Tibetan Buddhist prisoners advocated for international access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima and urged the Chinese Government to pursue dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives.

U.S. diplomatic personnel stationed in the country maintained contacts with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in the Tibetan areas, and they traveled regularly to the TAR and other Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom.

U.S. development and exchange programs aim to strengthen Tibetan communities in China and preserve their environmental and cultural heritage. Both are inextricably linked to Tibet's Buddhist religious tradition. The U.S. diplomatic mission in China has also promoted religious dialogue through its exchange visitor program, which financed the travel of several prominent scholars of traditional Tibetan culture and religion to the United States.

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